

(146). Most Western scholars have taken Taixu's "Human Realm/Human Life Buddhism" and his aspiration to build a "Pure Land on Earth" as flowing from a rejection of traditional Buddhism (particularly in its Amitabha Pure Land form), as too other-worldly and disengaged from human affairs, and inferred that he hoped to replace it with a new, modern Buddhism that could benefit the world here and now. While Taixu did espouse a more active role for Buddhists in promoting social welfare, he saw ethical action in the world as a prerequisite, not a substitute, for rebirth in Maitreya's Inner Court. Several later Buddhist leaders propagated this same accommodation of the traditional and the modern, even when promoting the cult of Amitabha rather than Maitreya. Furthermore, he based his Maitreyan thought on three traditional scriptures, actively sought rebirth in Maitreya's pure land (188), and instituted Maitreyan liturgies in the seminaries he founded.

The outbreak of war, first against the Japanese in 1937 and later against the Communist insurgency, interrupted Taixu's efforts to revive the cult of Maitreya. When World War II ended in 1945, Taixu appeared poised to propagate the cult with unprecedented effectiveness because of his connections and prestige, but his death in 1947 brought the effort to a halt. This is not the end of the story, however, since after a hiatus others came forward to promote the cult beginning in the 1980s. Ritzinger divides his exposition of this period in the cult's development between what he identifies as "openings" for it in mainland China and "openness" in Taiwan following the lifting of martial law in 1987. In this section, the author also widens the inquiry to show that Taixu's influence extended beyond the bounds of "orthodox" Buddhism and affected other Chinese religions, notably Yiguan dao and its main offshoot, the Maitreya Great Way.

This book is valuable insofar as its historical narrative and theoretical insights call into question much received scholarly wisdom and ask scholars to look anew at Chinese Buddhism in the twentieth century. Most important, it will cause scholars to go back to the primary sources and rethink what they believed they knew about "Humanistic Buddhism." Far from rejecting the "traditional" aspiration for rebirth in a pure land or nirvana as escapist and "superstitious," the "Human Realm Buddhism" espoused by Taixu and his successors not only sees no contradiction between this-worldly social welfare work and aspiration for a pure land rebirth after death but asserts that the first is a precondition for the second (123). Ritzinger also makes a successful case for placing religion and religious figures in their political contexts. What might Taixu's thought have looked like, for instance, had he fallen in with Marxists or attended a missionary college in his youth instead of anarcho-socialism (285)? Ritzinger also asserts the reverse, that students of Chinese revolutions must also attend to religion. This argument is not quite as convincing in light of his report that the Communist and Nationalist governments asserted sole claim to the task of reforming society and pushed the Maitreyan cult aside.

Still, this book will be indispensable for anyone interested in the history of modern Chinese Buddhism or the history of modern China. I recommend it without reservation.

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RIVERA, MAYRA. *Poetics of the Flesh*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015. vii+207 pp. \$22.95 (paper).

Poetics of the Flesh is a fierce text. It may not strike you this way at first, because its prose is controlled, even cautious. Its force is directed toward an ethical vision of care and

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responsiveness to the workings of the world. Reading the “signs of the times” in the spirit of liberation theology, Mayra Rivera is preparing new readers for *this* time by effecting a change in perception. Writing under the conditions of corporeal vulnerability, there is ethical urgency to her analysis of flesh. Working at the intersection of continental philosophy, Christian theology, and political theories (5), Rivera makes three important moves in the book. She recovers the concept of “flesh” in ancient Christian texts. Next, she reads flesh in relationship to social-material realities and particularly the marking of gender and race on corporeal life. Finally, she forges her insights through poetics.

Whereas Christian flesh is often interpreted through the Pauline writings, Rivera appeals to the “carnal poetics” of the Gospel of John to attest to the possibilities of thinking with flesh. Aware of the problematic history of flesh in Christianity, she makes the case that flesh offers something unique and necessary to appeals to the body in current theological and philosophical works. While the declaration of the Word becoming flesh can be pulled into this fraught history, Rivera draws out the dynamism in the gospel’s account of word, flesh, and spirit. The gospel, through its entangled terms, does not denigrate flesh but presents flesh in its “peculiar vitality,” as it interacts with and transforms in relationship to spirit, body, and bread (19).

Moving from carnal theology to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s carnal poetics, Rivera insists that his phenomenology preserves elements of the ancient Christian poetics in order to renew philosophical commitments to justice. His images of pulsing bodies—dilating and constricting, coiling and twisting, extending and folding—indict Christianity on its tentative relationship to its central teachings about incarnation. His vocabulary of fabric, coiling, and imbrication weaves a dynamic picture of the relationship of the body to the world. His vision of “carnal bonds” reminds Rivera of the gospel’s poetics. She writes: “Flesh is this fold. I am given to a world that vastly exceeds me—and it gives itself to me” (77). But there is also a sense that coming to grips with flesh is a matter of consenting to be in a particular relationship with the world. This positioning, this responsiveness, is Rivera’s aim in retrieving flesh.

The discussion of Franz Fanon and Aime Cesaire, in the chapter titled “Inescapable Bodies,” displays Rivera at her finest. She retains a visceral sense (or triggers a memory) of what it means to be marked by social forces. She is able to capture something of the insidious dimension of these markings, something that studies in trauma seek to witness when they refer to invisible wounds. It is not simply acts but, instead, the combination of actions and words that constitute the discursive forces disconnecting certain bodies from the world. Histories are worn and borne on bodies. Racialized discourses have “material effects”; discourses “mark our bodies” (114). The effects are often difficult to trace, and words often break apart when the stories of harm are being told. This is most clear in her description of Fanon’s body as “an object and a site of fantastic projections” and in her sensitive narration of his “attempts to relate meaningfully to the world he now inhabits” (121). Her insights in the previous chapters build and land with particular force in the analysis of Fanon. Rivera responds with a short and gripping sentence: “Race is pinned to the body” (122). This succinct statement, and others offered throughout, display Rivera’s razor-sharp insights, as she cuts through dense literatures, emerging with unparalleled clarity.

Rivera redirects conversations about race and gender in distinctive ways. She steers readers away from familiar modes of theorizing identities in her poetics. While she engages recognizable scholars, emphasis is placed on the rhythms and movements of bodies, impacted and impacting, shaped through forces outside of our control and yet responsive to the elemental conditions of life. The way that she draws on thinkers conveys that no theorist can fully speak to this. Instead, thinkers such as Judith Butler, Karen Barad, and Linda Martín Alcoff are also interacting, impacted, and responsible and re-

sponsive to descriptions. Rivera's approach to the central insights of critical theories by poetic means continues in the vein of scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde.

"Consenting to being flesh" (19) is a spiritual way, or an ethical path, distinctively offered by those who attend to poetics. Édouard Glissant orients Rivera in this task: "For Glissant, poetics refers not only to styles of writing, but also to modes of knowing, being, and acting in the world" (2). She appeals to Caribbean thinkers in order to disrupt certain theoretical grooves of thinking. Poetic writings have the capacity to "help redirect affects" (129) by way of their workings of language. Her meticulously crafted sentences and well-tended images seep into you. Much like the captivating cover art by Wangechi Mutu, Rivera's prose intrigues and conjures the elemental. Words reach and ooze, because they are not divorced from flesh but are the very matter of flesh. Rivera, a poetic interpreter of her conversation partners, displays, in lyrical turns, a mode of response.

The authorial "I" in *Poetics of the Flesh* is opaque, and yet the opacity is channeled through Glissant. Rivera's offer of the "I" and "my" is like a container for readers to inhabit: "My body is here, in this world, exposed to it and yet it has traces of a past that is not my own, that I can never know" (104). It also affirms and carries forward one of the profound contributions of Rivera's earlier work on relational transcendence. The "other" cannot be grasped, but transcendence may be discovered "in the flesh of others whom we touch" (*The Touch of Transcendence* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007], 2). Here, touch is performed. The author's body and words are part of the processes. The implications for philosophical and theological writing are profound and, for Christian theologians, go straight to the heart of claims about incarnation.

Rivera takes what makes others nervous about flesh and puts it forward in productive terms. Flesh reminds us of our connections. Her work reverberates with visions of humanity as precarious and fragile, receptive to the world in perilous and promising ways. Flesh is changeable, porous, and subject to invisible operations. It also reverberates with insights from trauma and postcolonial studies of the past haunting the present, and of the somatic transmission of violence. Through the term *flesh*, Rivera surfaces the interactions and interconnections that are often unacknowledged and yet nonetheless mark bodies. Unless we learn to see the effects of social-material processes, unless we develop skills to see the signs of "becoming flesh," we will not be able to address the harm done to bodies.

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SCHAIKER, ELLIE R. *Confessions of the Shtetl: Converts from Judaism in Imperial Russia, 1817–1906*. Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016. xi+339 pp. \$65.00 (cloth).

Confessions of the Shtetl: Converts from Judaism in Imperial Russia, 1817–1906 brings together two important discourses in the academic study of modern Judaism, namely the history of the shtetl and Jewish conversions to Christianity in the modern period. Ellie R. Schaiker explores the history of Jewish conversions to Christianity in the Russian Empire from 1817 (when Jews were granted confessional choice) to 1906 (when converts from Judaism were legally allowed to return to Judaism). Combining statistics and historiography with the accounts of individual converts found in newly available archival sources, her book makes a significant contribution to the fields of modern European history and Jewish studies.